

Message Text

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USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 2457

EO: 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR UR CO

SUBJ: OFFER OF SOVIET NAVAL VESSELS

1. SUMMARY: GOC DEFENSE MINISTRY SOURCES ADVISE THAT SOVIET UNION HAS OFFERED TO PROVIDE COLOMBIAN NAVY UP TO TWELVE OCEAN-GOING, MISSILE-ARMED PATROL VESSELS UNDER VERY FAVORABLE CREDIT TERMS. SOURCES CLAIM INFLUENTIAL MAJORITY IN MINDEF FINDS SOVIET OFFER ATTRACTIVE BUT WOULD STILL PREFER TO DEAL WITH US PROVIDED GENERALLY COMPARABLE SURPLUS USN VESSELS COULD BE MADE AVAILABLE AT REASONABLE PRICES. DATA ARE SOUGHT TO ENABLE OUR SOURCES TO PRESENT TO GOC DECISION LEVELS A PLAUSIBLE ALTERNATIVE TO ACCEPTANCE OF SOVIET OFFER. END SUMMARY.

2. WELL-PLACED SOURCE CLOSE TO GOC DEFENSE MINISTER SAYS THAT CURRENT PLANNING GUIDANCE CALLS FOR ACQUISITION OF MOST MAJOR MILITARY EQUIPMENT ITEMS FROM US SOURCES. BASIS FOR GUIDANCE IS LONG-STANDING FRIENDLY BILATERAL MILITARY RELATIONS, GREATER FAITH IN US AS SOURCE OF SPARE PARTS AND OTHER NECESSARY SUPPORT, AND CURRENT ASCENDANCY OF SCHOOL OF THOUGHT WHICH HOLDS THAT
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CHEAPER, SERVICE-PROVEN USED US EQUIPMENT SHOULD BE PREFERRED TO

MORE GLAMOROUS AND MORE EXPENSIVE NEW OR NEWER THIRD-COUNTRY EQUIPMENT, EVEN THOUGH LATTER MAY HAVE GREATER PERFORMANCE CHARACTERISTICS. THERE IS ALSO A STRONG SPECIFIC RELUCTANCE TO OPEN THE DOOR TO MAJOR ITEMS FROM SOVIET OR BLOC SOURCES, WHICH IMPLY INFUX OF ACCOMPANYING TECHNICIANS, DEPENDENCE ON UNCERTAIN SOURCES OF PARTS AND SUPPORT, AND POSSIBLE INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL COSTS.

3. APPARENTLY SEVERAL ATTRACTIVE OFFERS OF SOVIET AND BLOC EQUIPMENT HAVE BEEN MADE. TWO OF WHICH WE HAVE CURRENT KNOWLEDGE ARE AN OFFER OF YAK-40 AIRCRAFT, INCLUDING 90-DAY FREE TRIAL, AND THE PRESENT OFFER OF NAVAL PATROL VESSELS. DATA WE WERE GIVEN INDICATES THAT THE DOZEN SOVIET CRAFT OFFERED HAVE FOLLOWING GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS: 400-450 TONS, DIESEL ENGINES, 30-35 KNOT SPEED, EACH ARMED WITH TWO SURFACE-TO-SURFACE RADAR CONTROLLED MISSILES WITH EFFECTIVE RANGE OF ABOUT 35 NAUTICAL MILES. OFFER IS UNDERSTOOD TO BE FOR DELIVERY IN SIX MONTHS TO ONE YEAR, WITH INFRASTRUCTURE PACKAGE INCLUDING TWO-YEAR SUPPLY OF SPARE PARTS. PRICE IS UNKNOWN BUT IS APPARENTLY CONSIDERED OF MINOR IMPORTANCE SINCE FINANCING WOULD INVOLVE SOVIET AND/OR BLOC COFFEE CREDITS, SOME OF WHICH ARE OF CONVENTION COMPENSATION NATURE WHICH MAKE THE DEAL "ALMOST TOO GOOD TO REFUSE" FROM FOREIGN EXCHANGE VIEWPOINT. APPARENTLY SOVIETS ARE PERFECTLY WILLING TO PUT "POLITICAL" PRICES AND TERMS ON THE DEAL IN ORDER TO DRIVE THIS OPENING WEDGE INTO GOC MILITARY ACQUISITION PLANNING AND PRACTICE.

4. SOVIET OFFER COMES AT A TIME WHEN MINDEF PLANNING PUTS HIGHEST ACQUISITION PRIORITY ON FAST, OCEAN-GOING PATROL VESSELS. PRIORITY STEMS IN CONSIDERABLE PART FROM GOC FRUSTRATION AT NOT HAVING VESSELS WHOSE PERFORMANCE CHARACTERISTICS WILL PERMIT EFFECTIVE INTERDICTION EFFORTS AGAINST HIGHLY ORGANIZED CONTRABAND AND DRUG SMUGGLERS OPERATING PARTICULARLY OFF ATLANTIC COAST. FOR SIMPLE ECONOMIC REASONS, HOWEVER, THEY ARE SEEKING VESSELS WHICH ARE NOT ONLY FAST ENOUGH FOR ANTI-SMUGGLING WORK, BUT WHICH WILL ALSO REPRESENT ASSETS FOR EMPLOYMENT IN A MORE CONVENTIONAL NAVAL ROLE. LESSONS LEARNED ELSEWHERE ABOUT RELATIVE CLOUT OF SMALLER VESSELS ARMED WITH MISSILES ARE PROMINENT IN MINDS OF MINDEF PLANNERS AND ALL BUT MOST CONSERVATIVE OF COLOMBIAN NAVAL OFFICERS. PLANNED INITIAL EMPLOYMENT OF THE DOZEN PATROL VESSELS WOULD BE IN THREE GROUPS OF FOUR CRAFT, ONE GROUP ON THE CONFIDENTIAL

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PACIFIC COAST AND TWO ON THE ATLANTIC, WITH HALF OF EACH GROUP AT SEA MOST OF THE TIME. THOSE ON THE ATLANTIC COAST WOULD BE HEAVILY INVOLVED IN SUPPORT OF ANTI-SMUGGLING OPERATIONS, WITH POLICE AND CUSTOMS OFFICERS ROUTINELY ON BOARD DURING SEA OPERATIONS.

5. IN ORDER TO ASSIST COLOMBIAN PLANNERS IN PRESENTING A PLAUSIBLE US ALTERNATIVE TO ACCEPTANCE OF THE SOVIET OFFER, REQUEST

ASAP DATA ON AVAILABILITY, CONDITION AND PRICE FROM USN SOURCES OF SURPLUS CRAFT HAVING CHARACTERISTICS ESSENTIALLY COMPARABLE TO VESSELS OFFERED BY SOVIETS. MINDEF SOURCES SAY THAT CONSIDERATION COULD BE GIVEN TO CRAFT IN 250-450 TON RANGE, DIESEL-POWERED, AND CAPABLE OF 30-KNOT SPEEDS. COLOMBIAN NAVAL OFFICERS WHO RECENTLY RETURNED FROM PATROL VESSEL SHOPPING TRIP TO FRANCE, GERMANY, ISRAEL AND US APPARENTLY FORMED FAVORABLE IMPRESSION OF US ASHVILLE CLASS PG'S, SO THIS IS ONE POSSIBILITY. (FYI, THEY WERE ALSO VERY IMPRESSED WITH TACOMA BOAT CO. PSSM, BUT CONSIDERED PRICE OF \$7.5 MILLION PER COPY WITHOUT ARMAMENT TOO EXPENSIVE.) OUR INFORMATION IS THAT MINDEF HAS FOR MOMENT FROZEN CONSIDERATION OF ANY EXCEPTUS AND SOVIET CRAFT, PRESUMABLY BECAUSE NO ONE EXCEPT US COULD POSSIBLY COME CLOSE TO MATCHING CREDIT TERMS OFFERED BY SOVIETS, AS WELL AS GENERAL PREFERENCE FOR US EQUIPMENT. COLOMBIAN PLANNERS HAVE GONE SO FAR AS TO INDICATE THAT DESPITE OBVIOUS INTENTION OF EVENTUAL MISSILE ARMAMENT, THEY RECOGNIZE POSSIBLE US CONGRESSIONAL SENSITIVITY ON THIS ISSUE AND WOULD HENCE BE WILLING TO CONSIDER ONLY "CONVENTIONALLY" ARMED CRAFT, LEAVING MISSILE ISSUE FOR LATER RESOLUTION. ACCORDINGLY, ANY AND ALL ALTERNATIVE SUGGESTIONS WE CAN DISCUSS WITH GOC WILL BE WELCOME.

6. GOC REPORTED TO FEEL PATROL VESSEL DECISION POINT SHOULD COME IN 60-90 DAYS, SO SPEEDY RESPONSE ESSENTIAL. VIEWED OBJECTIVELY FROM ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASPECTS, SOVIET OFFER HAS TO BE ADMITTED TO LOOK VERY GOOD FOR COLOMBIA, AND IT APPEARS WE WILL BE WAGING AN UPHILL STRUGGLE TO FIND AN ACCEPTABLE ALTERNATIVE. HOWEVER, SUBJECTIVE POLITICAL AND MILITARY REASONS FOR REFUSING SOVIET OFFER ARE PRESENT, AND WE SHOULD IF AT ALL POSSIBLE TRY TO GIVE COLOMBIA A CHOICE.

7. WE WOULD ALSO WELCOME WASHINGTON COMMENTS ON THE GENERAL ISSUE REFLECTED HEREIN OF AN APPARENTLY SERIOUS SOVIET EFFORT TO GET A FOOTHOLD IN THE MILITARY EQUIPMENT MARKET HERE, AND WHAT
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WASHINGTON WOULD SEE AS THE EFFECT ON OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS, AND THE RAMIFICATIONS FOR THE HEMISPHERE, OF A COLOMBIAN ACQUISITION OF THIS MAGNITUDE FROM THE SOVIETS.
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